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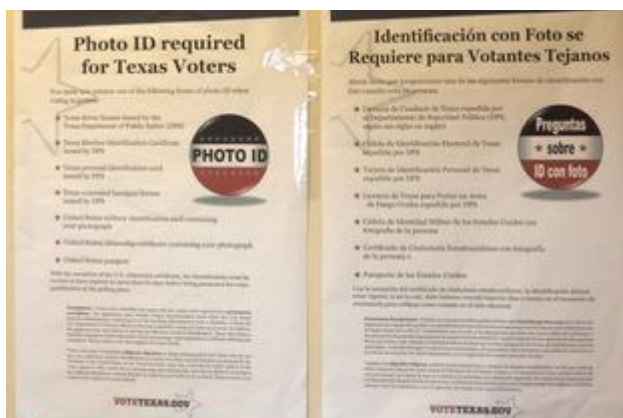
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★ THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Officials See Few Voter ID Issues During Early Voting

by [Julián Aguilar](#) | March 4, 2014 | [4 Comments](#)



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EL PASO — If early voting is any indicator, having to furnish a photo ID before casting a ballot shouldn't be a problem for the vast majority of Texans heading to the polls on Tuesday, according to elections officials.

But opponents of the state's [voter ID](#) law, [which was allowed](#) to go into effect last year after a prolonged legal battle, say it has already disenfranchised voters. They add that it only makes sense that the number of reported issues is low because people without a photo ID would not take the trouble to show up only to be denied a ballot.

Alicia Pierce, a spokeswoman for the Texas secretary of state's office, which administers state election laws, said the agency has not heard about any significant problems with primary voting.

That is supported by officials in Harris County, where there are more than 2 million registered voters — the most in the state. Officials there said that as of Monday, only eight voters encountered specific issues while trying to vote. About 105,500 voters cast ballots early in Harris County, including about 25,000

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mail-in ballots. Early voting ran from Feb. 18 to 28.

Stan Stanart, the [Harris County clerk](#), said three of the eight voters who encountered issues had an expired ID; the others didn't have an ID at all. Officials were still processing provisional paperwork, and the number of issues wasn't final, Stanart said, but overall there were few problems.

"Eight out of over 100,000 votes is a pretty small number," he said. "It's going well and not any immediate complaints or anything of that nature."

Opponents of the voter ID law have said it would disenfranchise the poor, elderly and minorities.

In [Webb County](#), a Democratic stronghold on the Mexican border, with a poverty rate of 30.6 percent, officials have said things also went well during early voting.

Oscar Villarreal, the county's elections administrator, said the number of voters increased compared with the 2010 midterm election. About 20,000 ballots were cast early in the county, which is about 95 percent Hispanic.

"We were a little bit over what we had four years ago, probably about 1,000," he said. "It wasn't that bad, but it wasn't that good either. But we'll take what we can get."


Villarreal said several voters presented proof that they renewed their driver's licenses, which he said shows people are aware of the photo ID requirement. He said the main issue for voters was a discrepancy between how their names appeared on their ID versus what was on the official list of registered voters. But it was easy enough to sign the [similar-name affidavit](#), he said. The affidavit is acceptable if officials determine that the names are "substantially similar."

The Texas Department of Public Safety also offers free voter ID cards, called election identification certificates, to voters without another viable form of ID. DPS said 226 certificates have been issued since June 2013.

Tuesday's primary was the [second statewide election](#) where voters had to show a photo ID to cast their ballots. The law was in effect for the November 2013 election, in which voters approved nine constitutional amendments, including one that allows the state to draw money from the state's Rainy Day Fund to finance water supply projects.



Attorney Chad Dunn, who represents plaintiffs [in a suit to halt the](#)

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ID requirement, said that obtaining a photo ID just to vote presents too many barriers for a lot of potential voters. The goal of voter ID, he said, is to intimidate people from even trying to vote, which isn't an easy metric to measure.

"It shouldn't be judged on how many people are stubborn enough to go down, take the day off work, spend money and show up at a polling location only to be turned away," he said. "That's like saying, how many people wake up in the morning and hit themselves in the head with a hammer?"

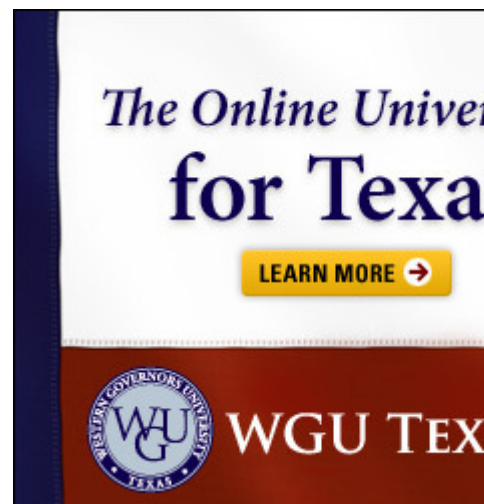
But proponents of the measure, including all of the state's top Republican leaders, argue that the law is necessary to ensure integrity at the ballot box. The measure only seeks to stop illegal voting, and supporters of the law say the state has a right to do that for its law-abiding citizens.

Dunn said he doesn't have an exact number of potential voters who have been affected because there are several plaintiffs in the case, including the [U.S. Department of Justice](#). But he said the number is in the tens of thousands and that is something that has already been revealed in court. He said estimates range from 800,000 to more than 1 million, according to data from the state and the federal government.

Dunn also said Texas' history of poor showings at the ballot box is another hurdle in determining the law's effect.

"We're at the bottom of the 50 states [in turnout], but it especially gets bad in primary elections and especially poor people, who particularly vote for Democrats," he said. "There isn't a real host of seriously contested Democratic primary elections to get people excited to turn out."

A recent University of Texas/Texas Tribune [poll](#) indicates that Democrats who are registered to vote in Texas are split on the issue. About 40 percent are fine with the law, compared with about 46 percent who find it problematic. Overall, however, about 66 percent of registered voters approve of voter ID.



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